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THE KING OF ITALY.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

THERE are to-day two monarchs in Europe of whom all things may be hoped and little said. Alphonso XIII. of Spain is one of them; the King of Italy is the other. Both are young, both wield an immensity of power which may save or destroy their kingdoms; both are seated on thrones that are only half secure, and have to grapple with problems that are as menacing as they are insistent; and both are still largely unknown quantities, to their subjects as well as to the outside world of eager onlookers. In neither case is there much that one may go upon with any confidence. Alphonso, in spite of the precocity natural in princes, has not yet found himself, is still in the making, and may turn out anything or nothing. Victor Emmanuel is thirty-three, and his character, did we but know what it was, must by now have taken a definite shape. But he has been only a little over two years on the throne, two years of comparative uneventfulness, and he lived as Prince of Naples behind a veil that was rarely lifted by others and never by himself. Even Italians do not profess to be sure what manner of man their ruler may be. There is, of course, the disposition to hope everything from a new king, especially in a country where the parliamentary system has lost what little prestige it ever had, and the monarch, if he chooses, may rule as well as reign.

The time of trial that will really test him is still to come. There are, however, signs and a few detached incidents out of which may be built some sort of estimate of the man. The evidence, though meagre and largely presumptive, is still interesting; and interesting in a way that seems to justify the hope that deeds will corroborate it. Italy being what she is, by deeds and deeds alone will her King be weighed. Leadership, initiative, the ability to "put things through," are what are required of him.

The King's infancy and boyhood were passed in studious ill-health. Queen Margherita, herself one of the most cultured ladies in Italy, took charge from the first of his education, and possibly drove him too hard. At any rate, his health suffered to a degree that alarmed even his easy-going father. King Humbert had spent his youth in the saddle, had fought for Italian unity, and was the only monarch in Europe who could show a scar received on the field of battle. For his son to grow up a nervous, impressionable boy, averse to open-air life, and absorbed in his books as though he were qualifying for a professorship, was a development so far from welcome to the stout-hearted Savoyard that it stirred him out of his constitutional inertia into action. He interfered decisively, confiscated the books, and almost drove his son out-of-doors, there to ride and shoot and yacht and harden himself. The change has done its work. Victor Emmanuel III., though neither so tall nor so muscular as his father and grandfather, has the wiriness and endurance that belong to the House of Savoy. He can sit for hours in the saddle without feeling fatigued, and he has the rarer capacity for going long without food. Years of ocean life and hard exercise on shore have dispelled the fear, at one time not unjustified, that he might fall a victim to consumption. It was not only his studious habits that gave his father some disquietude. He showed as a youth a haughtiness and self-will even more alien to King Humbert's nature, and was frequently punished for his escapades by being put under arrest and banished to lonely fortresses. Even as late as 1896, just before his marriage, when he was in his twenty-sixth year, he was sentenced by his father to a month's confinement for upbraiding Crispi. In the army, which he entered at eighteen, he made himself felt as a keen, if bookish, soldier, and an exacting disciplinarian. But both court and people agreed in thinking him of little account. A student-prince, who is also undersized and frail-looking, is never a popular prince. The masses do not care to hear details of the royal progress in mathematics, and they always seem to think that a prince who is really capable must also be a paladin in externals, an impressive, martial figure, like the late Emperor Frederick. They like a prince at least to "look the part," even if he cannot act it. The Prince of Naples scarcely did the first, and they therefore jumped to the notion that he could not do the second.

The Prince did nothing to alter what he must have known to be the general impression. He deliberately courted the shadows, never put himself forward, never advertised himself, as a prince may without offence, never interfered in politics. His private tastes and hobbies seemed to engross him utterly, and even in these directions he appeared out of touch with his future subjects. His favorite pastime was and still is coin-collecting. He is one of the first numismatists in Europe, and his collection of over twenty thousand coins ranks among the finest in the world. But this is not the sort of hobby that moves the popular imagination. Neither is electricity. No one felt stirred to extra loyalty when he heard that the Prince of Naples had turned one of his rooms in the Quirinal into a chemical laboratory, and was there experimenting with X-rays and the application of electricity to light, motive power, sound, and photography. Such avocations struck people as professional to a most unkingly degree. Nor did the Prince try to atone for them by lending himself to public pageantry. On the contrary, he took every opportunity of getting out of Italy. His yacht was constantly in commission, and one heard of him now in the Mediterranean, now taking a trip in Morocco, now spending months in the Far East—always, so report said, accompanied by stacks of books through which he diligently ploughed. He never travelled in state, but as quietly and with as little ceremony as though he had been a mere nobody.

Naturally enough, the public could make nothing of such a prince. It thought him, to speak candidly, rather a fool; first, because he preferred staying behind the scenes when he might have been in the centre of the stage; secondly, because he did nothing to make headway against the manifold influences that, thanks to his father's weakness and the incapacity or timidity of his ministers, threatened the stability of the throne itself. Once only did he break from his retirement and assert himself in politics. The disaster of Adowa, when seven thousand Italians were slaughtered by Menelek's army, under the guidance, as is believed, of French and Russian officers, sent the Crown-Prince hurrying to his father's side. He found the King closeted with Crispi, and then and there, in the presence of the King, he dealt out to the veteran intriguer a quite merciless tongue-lashing, ending in a demand for his dismissal. King Humbert sentenced his son to a month's confinement in a fortress, but Crispi was dis-

missed, and for the first time the Prince of Naples found a transient popularity with the masses. He emerged once more in this same year of 1896 to marry Princess Hélène of Montenegro, the "daughter of a strong race," as he afterwards described her in his first speech to Parliament.

They had met for the first time at Moscow during the Czar's coronation festivities. Princess Hélène must have watched that ceremony with some confusion of feeling. But for a turn of the wheel, she might have been one of the two central figures in it. Alexander III., who used to call her father his only friend in Europe, had destined her as the wife of his eldest son, the present Czar. Nicholas II., however, was unexpectedly not to be dictated to in such matters. He fell in love on his own account with Princess Alix of Hesse, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, and a Protestant. There was an immense commotion among the royal match-makers, and Nicholas was packed off on a tour round the world to cure him of his whim. The old trick failed, as it had failed before. He returned more devoted than ever, and Princess Hélène went back to her father's court at Cettinje. She was destined, however, to be a queen, after all. Her betrothal to Prince Victor was announced a few weeks after their first meeting. There were no politics in it, though it has had political results in drawing the Russian and Italian courts together in bonds of the friendliest intimacy.

These, practically, were the only two public appearances of the heir-apparent before he was suddenly called upon to ascend the throne; and when one reflects how utterly popular estimates of princes are at fault, even when they mix freely in social and public life, one is not inclined to judge the Italians harshly if they failed to see Prince Victor as he really was. They did not know—how could they?—that beneath his quiet, unimpressive exterior a strong will was being forged and an alert intelligence trained against the hour of his country's need. They did not know that this reserved little man was watching things from afar, silently, but with a thorough sweep; or that in his background of refined leisure he was gathering the invaluable outside point of view. They hardly suspected that in his studies there might be a serious purpose, or that when he travelled he was other than a fortunately placed sight-seer. They did not even guess that on all he saw this young Prince was turning a quick and questioning eye, was

seeing and thinking for himself, was collecting something more valuable than rare coins, was developing that peculiar faculty, of which Goethe frankly boasted, that enables a man to learn something from everybody.

Outside of Italy the significance of King Humbert's assassination has been rather missed. The tragedy of Monza was the murder of a monarch, but it was the salvation of the monarchy. What said Giovanni Bovio, the great philosopher and leader of the Republican party in the Chamber?—"The crime of Bresci may have shortened the reign of King Humbert by ten years, but it has added perhaps two centuries to the monarchy." That may be even an under-statement of the truth. There are many Italians who believe that Bresci saved Italy from an almost immediate civil war, which might have pulled down the House of Savoy in one wild *débâcle*. Over-taxed, hungry, utterly disillusionized, the nation was plunging towards the edge of the precipice when the bloody dagger interposed to sober and save it. How and why the fair hopes of the *risorgimento* had come to such a pass, it would take too long to explain. But one, and not the least important, of the contributory causes was the character of King Humbert himself. He had courage, but it was all wholly physical and personal. He was a dashing cavalry leader, and showed the true spirit of the House of Savoy on the battle-field and in the cholera hospitals. But politically he made himself a mere figure-head of the state. Except in arranging and upholding the Triple Alliance and in keeping the army up to the mark, he went out of his way to efface himself. He had, it was said, "constitutionalism on the brain." A fatalist by nature, nothing could move him to the point of self-assertion in domestic affairs. "*Vogliamo Re Umberto assoluto*," cried out all that was law abiding in Italy—"We want King Humbert, and Humbert an absolute monarch,"—but the cry was so much wasted breath. The imperturbable and immovable decision with which King Humbert did nothing was the one strong point in his character. He watched disaffection spread out into open rebellion, saw Parliament falling year by year into disrepute and uselessness, and Socialism and Republicanism menacing the throne itself—and yet kept neutral, passive, seemingly unconcerned. He tried to reign and yet not to rule, and, unhappily for Italy, he succeeded. The trend of the age is not against kings, but only against

fainéant kings. King Humbert never realized this, and that is why, chivalrous, stout-hearted gentleman though he was, his reign must be written down a failure.

His son, there can now be no question, saw the flaws of both reasoning and character that made such an attitude possible, and had, one supposes, resolved that when his time came the country should at least never have reason to call him Victor Emmanuel Do-Nothing. The people, of course, were far from suspecting any such resolve. To them he was still much of an enigma and more of a weakling. It was the poignancy of the occasion, and not the man himself, that gave interest to his début. But before he had spoken five minutes he had conquered the misunderstandings of years. The past almost ceased to exist as in confident ringing tones he pointed masterfully to the future and called on Italy to follow him. Even now, one cannot read that speech without a quickened pulse. It was a splendid scene. In the great hall of Montecitorio, standing before a brilliant concourse of princes, ambassadors, nobles, ministers, senators, and deputies, who were watching with well-concealed weariness what they expected to be a mere formal ceremony, the young King read out his speech—his own speech in very truth, as the first sentence convinced them all. This was no amiable concoction of ministers; the King was speaking his own thoughts, making his own pledges.

"Sacred was the word of the magnanimous Carlo Alberto who granted liberty, sacred that of my great ancestor who accomplished the union of Italy, sacred also the word of my august father, who in every act of his life showed himself worthy heir of the virtues of 'Padre della Patria.' Splendor and grace were lent to the work of my father by my august and venerable mother, who planted in my heart and imprinted on my mind feelings of princely and Italian duty. Even thus to my work will be joined that of my august consort, who, born of a strong race, will dedicate herself entirely to the country of her adoption. . . . May Monarchy and Parliament go hand in hand. . . . Unabashed and steadfast, I ascend the throne, conscious of my rights and of my duties as a King. Let Italy have faith in me, as I have faith in the destinies of our country, and no human force shall destroy that which with such self-sacrifice our fathers builded. It is necessary to keep watch and to employ every living force to guard intact the great conquests of unity and of liberty. The serenest trust in our liberal charter will never fail me, and I shall not be wanting, either in strong initiative or in energy of action in vigorously defending our glorious institutions, precious heritage from our great dead. Brought up in the love of religion and of the father-

land, I take God to witness of my promise that from this day forward I offer my heart, my mind, my life, to the grandeur of our land."

Brave and stirring words, with such overwhelming response of cheers and weeping and wild tumult of cries as to be at times almost inaudible, the young King emphasizing his earnestness by a dig now and then with his scabbard, but otherwise showing an impenetrable, collected face, masking the stern elation of his heart. On the morrow Italy had but one phrase in which to give her verdict—"The master has come." Such vibrant notes of decision and resoluteness had not been heard in the Peninsula since the days of Charles Albert of Sardinia and the great Victor Emmanuel.

Nor were they to be the last in the same strain. In a speech that followed shortly after, he said:

"In Italy, no man does his duty. From the highest to the lowest the *laissez faire* and laxity are complete. Now it is to the accomplishment of their several duties that all, without distinction, must be called. I begin with myself, and am trying to do my duty conscientiously and with love. This must serve as an example and a spur to others. My ministers must help me in everything. They must promise nothing that they cannot certainly perform; they must not create illusions. Him who fulfils his duty, braving every danger, even death, I shall consider the best citizen."

Again one seems to catch in this the accent of the inevitable leader.

But do his actions accord with his clear-edged words? They do. He began well by calling to power the veteran Liberal, Signor Zanardelli. That in itself was a proof that repression and revenge were not to be his policy, and that when he spoke of reform he meant it. He went on to reorganize and considerably reduce the royal household; he made thorough inspections of the public institutions and military depots in Naples and Rome, praising and blaming as seemed right; he broke down the barrier that formerly kept King and politicians apart, and now he gives audience to public men once every day; he took from the first an active share in cabinet councils, and has done all in his power to stimulate and brace up his ministers. It was by his personal intervention that the excavations in the Forum are now being continued. It was he who saved the Vittorio Emanuele Library, the glory of Rome, with its 360,000 volumes and 5,000 priceless

manuscripts, from being crippled by a cheese-paring minister. It was his influence that probed the Casale trial to its depths of infamy, that insisted on the Mafia and its archleader, Palizzolo, being brought to justice. To him and his energy and inflexible sense of duty it is largely due that reform is no longer in the air, but on the statute-book, that a beginning is being made towards an impartial administration of the laws.

We may therefore judge Victor Emmanuel III. to be a really strong King, who will not only lead, but control, who will not hesitate to command when suggestions fail, and who will see to it that his commands are obeyed. And a strong King of Italy, as wise as his best advisers, irremovable, and armed with that magic power of propulsion which is one of the attributes of royalty, might be the most efficient of premiers. He is the working head of the army and navy; he can select any man for minister he chooses, and practically compel him to resign; he can dissolve or prorogue Parliament at discretion; he can personally insist that no criminal be pardoned; he can appeal directly in his own name to his people; and whenever order is menaced he can issue decrees that have the force of law. He has, in short, the combined powers of an American President and an English premier, and he holds them for life, with this further advantage, that no Italian Parliament would for a moment oppose the will of a popular, visibly efficient ruler. This is an immense amount of authority to be vested in one man, but it would really seem that Victor Emmanuel, by his breadth of comprehensive sympathy and insight, his serious cultivation, his manly and determined temperament, is worthy to wield it. So dramatically complete is the conquest he has won over his subjects, that the half-despised Prince of three years ago is now the sheet-anchor of the nation's best hopes. A colossal task lies ahead of him, to equalize taxation without reducing revenue, to foster education, to see that justice is done in deed as well as in name, to bring meaning and vitality back into public life, local as well as national, to steer a safe course between the Clericals on the one side and the Socialists on the other, and to guide and uplift the country through a new and more lasting *risorgimento*, of which his own efficiency is perhaps the surest pledge.

SYDNEY BROOKS.